Grun:

A story of Barra's Lost Neanderthal Age

by

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Barra, present Day Scotland, 3000 BC

Grun struck the two pieces of flint together, orange sparks dancing for a brief moment in the cave's darkness.

Sparrow, sitting across from him, snickered.

"Bad hands."

She laughed, rocks shifting underneath her weight.

Grun ignored her. He was used to the mocking.

Again he brought the stones together, and this time the wood caught fire.

"Well done."

Tarful said, old leathery hands clapping Grun's back so hard he thought the elder's hands would be imprinted on his skin.

"Naska, Wolf. Bring over the meat."

Two men emerged from the shadows carrying chunks of a kill they made earlier in the day.

Naska was Sparrow's older brother by five years. Both possessed the same red hair from their late mother, a Fairy woman.

Naska's eyebrow ridges, prominent even by their people's standards, were illuminated by firelight. Grun thought Naska an ugly man, but kept such thoughts to himself.

"You two did well today,"

Tarful praised them while preparing the meat to skewer.

"He,"

The elder pointed to the kill,

"Was a mighty beast. His spirit was strong."

The others praised them anew, but Sparrow targeted Grun.

"And what of you?"

She hissed, her face cloaked in shadow,

"Did you bring home meat?

She knew the answer, they all did. Grun's bad left leg, curved slightly inward, made running nearly impossible. His face couldn't make the same expressions as the others, it remained fixed whether he was happy or sad. His eyes, big and brown, rarely blinked unless he consciously thought of it and even then they never closed completely.

Tarful said he was marked as a friend of the Gods, but Sparrow and Naska derided him as a defect of creation.

"You know."

Grun's reply, a quiet one, carried the sound of his 'broken

voice', Naska 's term for it. It was one of the reasons he rarely spoke unless Tarful asked him a question.

Sparrow snickered but said nothing more, the rest of the evening passing quietly.

Each step Grun took hurt. Both legs carried a sickness Tarful's Magic couldn't heal.

His only relief was the walking spear the elder crafted for him at fifteen, without it his mobility would be near nonexistent.

Early in the morning Naska, Wolf and Sparrow decided to fish in the bay outside the cave, still gone three hours later.

Tarful asked Grun to check on them, so he made his way out, awkwardly stepping over smooth stones and clumpy white sand. He found the three not outside but down from the cave in the open water, Naska and Wolf joking with each other

while thrusting their spears down into the water. Sparrow sat on the side sharpening a hand axe. Once she noticed him she tapped Naska's leg.

"Look who Tarful sent to watch us."

Grun stood on the beach directly opposite of the boat, leaning on his spear.

"Tarful want...to know if you're finished?"

"Not yet."

Wolf answered. Out of the three he was the only one who seemed to accept Grun.

"Haven't caught much."

"Go back to the old man,"

Naska snapped, ugly face swinging around to stare at him.

"Leave us in peace, defect."

The words were nothing new. Neither was the sadness he always let wash over him when he heard them.

"Tarful said to come in."

"We aren't done yet you fool."

Sparrow said, throwing a piece of stone at him.

"We'll be done soon."

Wolf smiled.

Grun nodded and started to turn when he noticed the blue

water underneath the boat suddenly turn black and it grew rapidly.

His heart leapt into his throat.

"Water!"

He pointed frantically. Sparrow rolled her eyes. She---

The boat exploded, a gigantic grey body burst out of the ocean.

Grun watched Wolf fly into the air arms and legs thrashing wildly.

He dropped just as fast, directly into the creature's mouth.

Sparrow and Naska fell into the water. Seconds later the creature's body slammed down with a resounding smack that resembled a thunder clap, crushing Naska under itself,

sending waves to shore.

Grun spotted Sparrow bobbing in the water. He ran into the water immediately.

Gripping his spear tight he doved under. To his right he caught sight of the beast. It was dragging Naska by a leg, the man clearly dead.

It looked bigger than an entire island, scarred grey body corded with muscle. It's eyes two big black pools.

Grun fought from panicking and swam for Sparrow, reaching her as he felt the water shift.

He turned. The beast approached, jaw locked in what almost looked like a smile. Grun braced, holding the spear out as the monster drew close. He heard Sparrow scream but kept focused.

When the grey beast came within inches of them Grun jabbed

out with his spear, flint puncturing the skin, shaft shattering into pieces.

Instantly the monster pushed up, head thrashing violently from side to side, blood filling the water.

Seizing his chance Grun grabbed Sparrow and made it to shore.

She collapsed on the sand. Grun looked back to ensure their attacker was gone.

He watched a giant fin slice through the bloody water before slipping below.

Debris from the boat washed up alongside them, a small amount of blood on them.

Grun sat down beside Sparrow hoping she may be unharmed. Physically she was, but she stared blankly ahead.

Exhausted, Grun laid down, falling into a deep sleep.

Sparrow survived the attack and Grun became a hero among their tribe for his swift rescue and brief battle with the beast.

Tarful named him Sparrow's Guardian in the following months as she struggled to care for herself. He fed her, helped her bathe, and slept beside her. Physically fine, she regressed into a child like state, even her speech was broken.

"The Gods paid her back for the cruelty."

Tarful once told Grun while the two escorted Sparrow to a shallow lake to wash.

"She mocked you as a defect. What has she become?"

"A victim."

Grun said back. He didn't believe the Gods were so cruel. Regardless he knew what it was like to be different. He sympathized with her, there was no room for vengeance in his mind.

A year following the attack strangers were spotted off the coast in long boats. Unlike Grun's people, who were pale, stocky, and had prominent eyebrow ridges and bulbous noses, many of the strange people were light brown or almond coloured, with flat eyebrow ridges and long noses. Others, while having the same facial features as their friends, were pale like Grun's tribe.

Tarful and he met with a band of these men not long after they first started appearing.

They called themselves The People of Cessair after a certain Cessair, a granddaughter of Noah, a holy man from the East in a land called Sumer.

Standing beside Tarful on the knoll Grun took stock of the leader, a man named Kenan.

Around forty, handsome with curly black hair and a strong build. Most striking to Grun, was Kenan's weapon. A long solid blade made of material he never saw before.

Kenan stated his people wanted to settle among them as friends and asked Tarful for permission.

The elder agreed, the two sides invoking their respective Gods. Kenan called upon deities named Enki and Enlil while Tarful and Grun invoked Danu, Mother Goddess of their people, then the two sides parted ways.

Later in the night, as Tarful and the others slept Grun left the cave to walk the coast.

Chilly and dangerous he didn't care, he had done it many

times before. He used the new spear Tarful made him to maneuver over the stones and up onto the grass where he sat looking up at the sky.

Dozens of stars filled his vision, twinkling in the blue night.

Tarful once told him the stars had been created from Dragon's blood during an ancient war among the Gods before humans and the other races existed.

Grun thought of Kenan and his weapons, of how different his people were from his own yet how similar.

He never told Tarful but upon meeting the People of Cessair he sensed the end of their own tribe and way of life. Not through war or bloodshed, but through adoption. The people of Cessair possessed skills they could never dream of.

He knew his tribe would need to adopt or vanish completely from the island.

"Defect."

The word cut through the cold silence of night, settling on him immediately.

Sparrow.

"You're better." In his mind he smiled, though in reality his face remained expressionless.

His concern for her welfare overrode any emotion he felt about the word.

"Naska's life was taken because of you."

Grun jabbed the spear into the ground and slowly rose, Sparrow behind him.

"You're a curse."

She held a hand axe in her left hand, red hair tied in a braid.

"The sea took Naska and Wolf. Not I."

Grun looked down at his feet, cut and bruised from his struggles.

"Our tribe's been cursed ever since you were born to us, defect."

She threw the word at him, putting all of her hatred into it. Grun, well used to it, said nothing.

Sparrow dropped the axe.

"He should be here."

She started to sob. Grun reached out for her, and to his

surprise she let him hug her.

How long she cried he didn't know but she fell asleep eventually and he laid her down on the grass, sitting down beside her.

He watched the stars until morning.

Author's Notes: To ensure readers know why I made the choices I did for the story, I want to share that I personally believe Neanderthals survived alongside humans well into recorded history.

In fact I believe they existed for a relatively short time in the grand scheme of things, from roughly 4000 BC to 3000 BC, before being absorbed by humans. I believe red hair, a sign of Fairy/Elven blood, was brought into the Scottish population (or rather their ancestral populations) through, at least in part, by intermarriage between humans and Neanderthals, and that several Scottish Clans, including Clan MacNeil and Clan Donald, carry high concentrations of Neanderthal blood.

The same is true with the Megalodon. While mainstream science believe it died out long before humans emerged, I believe that it existed into antiquity before dying off.

I know to many these ideas are outlandish, but I don't expect you to agree with me, I mention them solely so that you can understand my reasoning behind writing the story how I did and even if you disagree strongly with me, I hope you enjoyed the story as entertainment.